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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE. NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/PASCUAL

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TAGS: KWBG PGOV PREL PTER PHUM KPAL IS

SUBJECT: FATAH LEADERS ADVOCATE CABINET SHUFFLE

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) Summary. In December 7 and 10 meetings with Polchief Fatah leaders Azzam al-Ahmed and Nabil Amre advocated replacing some members of PM Fayyad's cabinet with Fatah members. They said the current cabinet is weak and isolated, and the PA must draw on Fatah's popular strength. PolChief expressed USG concern about any changes to the current cabinet. End Summary.

Azzam Al-Ahmed Supports Cabinet Shuffle

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¶12. (C) PLC Fatah-bloc leader Azzam al-Ahmed told PolChief December 7 that the current PA cabinet lacks broad-based Palestinian support. He commented that PM Fayyad is the "only one holding the current government together," but argued that international support should be for the Palestinian people, not individual leaders. He criticized the current government, accusing some ministers of corruption and describing most as weak and without sufficient experience or even name recognition.

¶13. (C) Al-Ahmed dismissed USG concerns that any changes to the current Cabinet would risk donor and Israeli confidence in the PA. Al-Ahmed said he does not want to replace Fayyad as PM, only some of his Ministers, and rejected the possibility that Fayyad would resign if forced to change his cabinet. He said a strong Prime Minister should want strong ministers. Al-Ahmed added that the most important challenge Palestinians face is the West Bank-Gaza split and criticized the current government for failing to develop a clear plan for Gaza. He said appointing new ministers will help address Gaza's problems, help heal this rift and blunt Hamas' popularity.

¶14. (C) Al-Ahmed indicated that Fatah members increasingly feel they are being side-lined and are determined to implement a Cabinet reshuffle. He said he and other Fatah leaders have met with PA President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) to press this issue.

Nabil Amre Calls for New Cabinet

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¶15. (C) In a December 10 meeting, Presidential Media Advisor Nabil Amre echoed criticism of the government and argued for a change in his cabinet. Amre said he is not working against Fayyad, but the PM's government is "weak and isolated." A new cabinet including Fatah will allow the Prime Minister to lead "a real coalition" and create strong leadership, he said. He specifically urged a new Minister of Education who will dismiss the mid-level Hamas members whom he said compose much of the ministry staff. Amre said Fayyad paid salaries and tackled security in Nablus, but his biggest card is his

USG relationship. Amre said paying salaries is not enough, suggesting that Fayyad cannot "buy" Palestinian support.

¶ 16. (C) Amre noted that the PA Basic Law does not allow for changes in a caretaker government, but said Fatah members will continue to "make trouble" for Fayyad unless he includes them in the government. He warned that "Fatah is in a corner, with no money, no authority, no leadership, and no way to compete with Hamas." He urged the USG to empower Fatah's base, not its leaders, to combat Hamas and to support Fatah student unions and other grassroots efforts. Amre also urged Fayyad to build strong relationships outside the USG. "We must protect Salam Fayyad, but he must protect himself first," said Amre.

¶ 17. (C) Amre told PolChief he will be in Cairo for the next month and kept repeating that he is "out of it" and not part of the Fatah effort to change the cabinet. He disputed the USG position that changing the cabinet risks undermining confidence in the PA and that changing one minister risks unraveling the whole government. However, he said he will advise Fatah leaders to "back off for a while and give Fayyad more time."

Comment

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¶ 18. (C) Al-Ahmed and Amre are by all accounts leading Fatah efforts to undermine Fayyad and to force him to bring Fatah members into the government. They know the USG supports Fayyad fully and they have received the message that the USG wants Fatah to back off and allow Fayyad and the current cabinet to govern. Amre seemed to have been briefed on the al-Ahmed meeting and suggested that the word has gone out in Fatah. However, the Fatah leaders were unpersuaded by USG

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arguments that right now only PM Fayyad's government can deliver on the promises of Annapolis and Paris. In fact, al-Ahmed said "we must agree to disagree" on that. Abu Mazen will need to hold the line and prevent Fatah from undermining Fayyad and his cabinet.

WALLES